Ray is cautioned to duck Bell on King quiz offer

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From Combined Services

WASHINGTON — The lawyer for the convicted assassin of Martin Luther King says he's advised his client not to submit to questioning by Attorney General Bell or one of Bell's aides.

Bell said yesterday that "I'd like to talk with [James Earl] Ray" in an effort to clear up what the Attorney General said he regarded as unanswered questions about the 1968 Memphis murder.

But Ray's lawyer, James H. Lesar, said "the best and only way to protect Ray's rights is by seeing that he gets a new trial."

Bell said he doesn't consider the King case closed, but merely "in abeyance."

'I'VE PUZZLED'

"I've puzzled over that case ever since the slaying took place," he said.

Bell said his principal doubts about the case concerned how Ray "got his money" and the identification documents necessary to lead authorities on a world-wide chase.

"I don't think we're going to find out [about these matters] except from Ray," Bell said.

He said he wanted to question Ray personally "or send one of my top people in whom I have complete confidence and who knows how to interrogate."

Bell's remarks came on the heels of a report released a week ago by the Justice Dept. which virtually ruled out the possibility that Ray had been part of conspiracy to kill King.

ATTORNEY GEN. BELL
'Like to talk with Ray.'

JAMES EARL RAY
New trial sought.

The report included a letter from Ray in which he refused to be interviewed by a Justice Dept. lawyer.

Lesar denounced the document as "dishonest." He said that in three or four months he would return to court to ask a new trial by citing "evidence that has to be confidential for the moment."

The U. S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals denied Ray a new trial last May, and the Supreme Court refused to review the decision.

Since he pleaded guilty to King's killing, Ray has maintained that he was coerced into signing a confession by his lawyer.

Bell said he might offer Ray some "consideration" in return for his cooperation, "if I believed he was telling the truth."

But Bell noted that because Ray is a Tennessee state prisoner serving a 99-year sentence the Attorney General could do no more than speak to state authorities on Ray's behalf.

PASSPORT DOUBTS

"I was wondering how a person who had been in prison all his life could get all those passports," Bell said.

The department report noted that Ray had applied for Canadian passports under two pseudonyms and then had traveled to London and Lisbon after killing King.

In the 14 months between Ray's prison escape and his capture, his partial expenditures totaled $5554.51, according to an appendix to the report. Over the same period, his "known income" totaled $664.34 — all pay checks from the Indian Trail Restaurant in Winnetka, Ill., where he worked as a dishwasher and cook's helper.